THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Government have seen Chinese media reports stating that the Qinghai-Tibet railway is expected to be further extended from Lhasa to Xigaze. These reports also state that the construction of this 254-kilometres long rail section is expected to be completed by 2010.

(b) Government keep a constant watch on all developments having a bearing on India's security and takes all necessary measures to safeguard it.

Visa for persons from Pakistan

504. SHRI TARLOCHAN SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of persons of Pakistan that have been granted visa to visit India during the last three years, profession-wise; and

(b) the number of Indians that have been given visa during last three years to visit Pakistan profession-wise?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Visas are granted according to purpose of visit and not profession-wise. Total number of visas issued to Pakistani nationals by High Commission of India, Islamabad during the last three years is as follows:

2004 - 60230

2005 - 88990

2006 - 87512

Information about total number of visas issued to Pakistani nationals by other Indian Missions/Posts abroad during the last three years is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House as soon as available.

(b) Visas to Indians for visiting Pakistan are granted by the Missions/Posts of Pakistan located in India or abroad. Information on number of Indians visiting Pakistan is, therefore, not available with the Government.

New norms for passports

505. SHRI M.V.MYSURA REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of new norms fixed by Government for issuing passports to the Indians in the country;

(b) the minimum/maximum time-limit for issuing passports to the persons who have applied; and

(c) the steps that are being taken by Government to avoid queues at the regional passport offices in the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) Under the normal category, fresh passports are to be issued within 30 days subject to receipt of clear Police Verification Report and completion of all formalities. In Re-issue/Renewal cases, passports are to be issued/ renewed within 15 days from the date of application subject to completion of all formalities and documentation, as required under the Rules. Under the "Tatkal Scheme", passports are to be issued within 7 days or within 14 days depending upon the payment of prescribed fees and submission of documents required under the Tatkal Scheme. The passports under the Tatkal scheme are to be re-issued within 3 working days on payment of prescribed fee and submission of prescribed documents.

(c) Several steps such as introduction of token system, online registration of applicants, separate counters for senior citizens, Tatkal scheme and passport facilitation counters have been introduced to reduce queues at the Passport Offices in the country. In addition, passport applications are also collected at 464 District Passport Cells, 1095 Speed Post Centres and 16 Passport Application Collection Centres across India.

Agreement for civil nuclear cooperation

†506. SHRI DATTA MEGHE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India and America have agreed on most of the issues towards final agreement for civil nuclear cooperation;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether there are some issues where both the countries still do not fully agree; and

(d) if so, the progress made to fulfil all the commitments made in the understanding reached between President of U.S.A. and Prime Minister of India in July, 2005 and the details of the issues where there are difficulties in reaching any understanding?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (c) India and the USA have agreed on the text of a bilateral 'Agreement for Cooperation between the Government of India and the Government of the United States of America Concerning Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy'.

(d) The outcome of the discussions is the final text that has been agreed to the mutual satisfaction of both Governments. It reflects the political understandings and commitments of July, 2005 and March, 2006 and the basic principles listed out in the statement of Prime Minister in Parliament on August 17, 2006. The text of the Agreement has been released to the public on August 3, 2007.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi